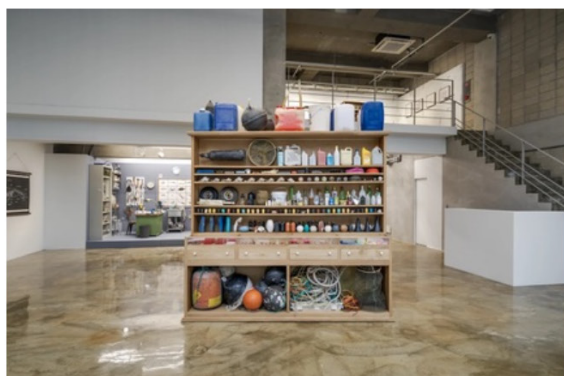


# ARTFORUM



View of "The Sea Life of South Korea and Other Curious Tales, 2021.

SEOUL

## Mark Dion

BARAKAT CONTEMPORARY

36, Samcheong-ro 7-gil, Jongno-gu

September 8–November 7, 2021

Mark Dion's adventuresome experiments in fact and fiction have finally taken him to Seoul, where he injects his signature *Wunderkammers* with local flavor, putting Korea's marine ecosystem on display.

For this exhibition's vast, elaborate centerpiece, *Cabinet of Marine Debris* (all works 2021), the artist reimagines the cabinet of curiosities, showcasing fishing nets, colorful bottle caps, and other plastic waste gleaned from the country's south and west coasts. Borrowing institutional classification systems from the sixteenth century, Dion recycles such banal stuff into *objets d'art*. Simultaneously, Korea-specific words printed on products, such as *Chamisul* on a green liquor cap, hint at the artificiality of borders and culture.

Dion also taxonomizes Korean sea creatures in drawings presented in ivory mat-board frames. At first glance, they look like they belong in a traditional museum exhibit. But his pseudoscientific codification produces multiple layers of narrative, raising questions about the subjectivity inherent to scientific methodology. In *Birds*, for example, Dion classifies a particularly strange-looking specimen under the name "Yi Sang"—a suitable avian ambassador of 1930s Korean avant-garde literature. Elsewhere, *Sea Life of South Korea* re-creates an early-twentieth-century marine laboratory, replete with gently worn furniture and flea-market props. Throughout the show's run, local miniaturists are invited to draw fresh sea creatures from a nearby market and hang their illustrations on the wall, resituating the diorama as a space that unfolds across past, present, and future: As with Dion's cabinets, the artisans' work offers a shrewd reminder of the world's wonders and the human incuriosity that threatens to exile them to history.

— Hayoung Chung